

Using an institutional repository to support records management and digital preservation (RMDP)

The Scenario

Valerie, Records Manager at the University of Hull, is tasked with updating the University's Manual of Policies and Procedures on a rolling annual cycle. Updating is required both to inform the University of correct practice and to ensure compliance with current legislation, regular parts of records management. All the individual sections of the Manual are securely held in the University's internal part of the institutional repository, and each is flagged for updating at the appropriate time of year. Once the flags are activated, Valerie and the document owners are alerted and initiate an update workflow that guides them through the process. It has recently been agreed that two of the policies will be published through the public-facing part of the institutional repository. Valerie accesses the documents and initiates a publication workflow that transfers them between repositories and ensures the appropriate access privileges are set.

A range of other, superseded, documents have been marked for archiving. Valerie calls them up in the repository and initiates a preservation workflow that calls on services external to the institution to supply information on format and appropriate preservation strategies that can be stored alongside the documents or used to carry out preservation actions. Jane, the University Archivist, is alerted of this activity and Archives staff review the documents prior to acceptance as preserved items.

Records Management

There are three key properties that all 'records' must possess¹:

Content | Context | Structure

Adherence to these properties produces records that have:

Authenticity | Completeness | Reliability | Fixity

Records management has tended to focus on administrative records with these characteristics, whether digital or print. Other types of digital content can also benefit from being considered in the same way, and can provide better digital objects to underpin a repository as a record and source of quality information.

So why use an institutional repository to manage records?

- ✧ A repository is designed to manage content
- ✧ Recording metadata and relationships within a repository provides context
- ✧ A repository provides structure to assist in organising records
- ✧ Repositories aim to provide authenticity, completeness, reliability and fixity, whether for open access or other materials
- ✧ Repositories enable rapid access to records when required
- ✧ A single system can be used for content from different parts of the institution

¹ As proposed by JISC infoNet Records Management infoKit – <http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/infokits/records-management/>

Digital Preservation

Institutional repositories are under current investigation for their ability to support digital preservation². Whilst systems for digital preservation are still evolving, repositories are increasingly being used as the basis of or a component of such systems.

Digital preservation requires information (metadata) to be stored about the digital objects themselves (format etc.), events that occur, agents that have acted on the object, and rights³. These can start being collected from the point an object is created, as part of its ongoing management.

Institutional repositories cannot always provide all this information directly. Remote tools can assist, possibly via Web Services.

Examples include:

- ✧ PRONOM-DROID, from The National Archives, provides format information
- ✧ JHOVE, JSTOR/Harvard Object Validation Environment, provides technical metadata
- ✧ CRiB, from the University of Minho, Portugal, provides recommendations for format migration
- ✧ AONS, Australian Obsolescence Notification System

² For examples see http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/programme_preservation.aspx and <http://www.sun-pasig.org>

³ These are sections from the PREMIS Data Dictionary, <http://www.loc.gov/standards/premis/>

Policies support and guide the development of usable records and effective repositories, leading to efficient digital preservation

Records management is an early stage in digital preservation, ensuring that the appropriate and correct information is recorded in the repository to inform digital preservation practice. Records management thus feeds into digital preservation as part of the overall lifecycle management of the records concerned.

Workflows are essential components of repository management, whether process or technically-driven, and can link records management and digital preservation

Credits and Further Information

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This work is taking place under the auspices of the JISC-funded REMAP project, which is investigating the incorporation of time-based flags and external web services within managed workflows to assist in repository-based records management and digital preservation



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